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SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS DAY EVENT FOCUSES ON GENDER VIOLENCE

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Summary  
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1. Post sponsored a Human Rights Day event on December 13. The program featured a panel discussion of four prominent women activists who discussed gender violence in Jordan, including honor crimes. The audience of approximately 45 included activists, NGOs, GOJ officials, local press, and members of the Embassy community. Charge delivered opening remarks. End summary.

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Combating Gender Violence  
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2. Post marked Human Rights Day with a program on December 13 focusing on gender violence. The event, held under the auspices of post's chapter of the Federal Women's Program, included a panel discussion with four activists who discussed the challenges of dealing with this highly sensitive topic in a conservative Muslim society, as well as several programs underway in Jordan to prevent gender violence. Guests included Dalia Farouki of the National Center for Human Rights (NCHR), Dr. Amal Sabbagh of the Jordanian National Commission for Women, Rana Hussein, activist and Jordan Times journalist, and Frances Abouzeid, director of the MEPI-funded Freedom House family violence program based in Jordan.

3. The program coincided with a nationwide program organized by Freedom House and local NGOs to mark the global campaign of 16 Days of Activism Against Family Violence. During the discussion, Abouzeid highlighted some of the activities conducted in Jordan during the campaign designed to increase awareness about the problem, including the release of a public service television commercial that Freedom House has funded with MEPI support. The commercial poignantly demonstrated how young children are adversely affected by family violence. Abouzeid mentioned another successful Freedom House program conducted during the campaign, a series of interactive plays about family violence held at universities throughout Jordan. The plays spark candid discussion from audience members about gender violence and common attitudes toward women.

4. Dalia Farouki from the National Center for Human Rights discussed their MEPI funded program of interactive workshops at universities to raise awareness and change attitudes about gender violence. She involved the audience during her presentation by taking a quick poll of audience members' attitudes toward gender and violence. Dr. Amal Sabbagh of the Jordanian National Commission for Women and Rana Hussein, a journalist, discussed their work to stop so-called "honor crimes" through legal counseling, legislative reform, and cultural change. They also detailed their efforts earlier this year to discredit a popular book that provided a grossly inaccurate account of honor crimes in Jordan.

5. Sabbagh commented that the most important link in combating gender violence in Jordan -- and the greatest challenge -- was to cultivate a change in culture at the grassroots level so that violence would no longer be tolerated as an option in family disputes. She emphasized that reaching out to all segments of society is essential in combating family violence, including the religious establishment. Farouki noted that the NCHR has provided training about dealing with family violence to Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs counselors, who often deal with cases of family violence.

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